

Rock Harbor Lodge Guest House
Isle Royale National Park
Keweenaw County *R Houghton Vic.*
Michigan

HABS No. MI-246

HABS
MICH,
42-HOU.V,
2A

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Midwest Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68102

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROCK HARBOR LODGE GUEST HOUSE

HABS No. MI-246

Location: Rock Harbor area, Snug Harbor area east-northeast of marina on the shoreline of Rock Harbor, Isle Royale National Park, Keweenaw County, Michigan.

Present Owner: National Park Service.

Present Use: Housing and storage; to be demolished in 1985.

Significance: The Guest House, completed in 1924, was the last development at the Rock Island Lodge before the National Park Service. It was the last large lodge building constructed on the island and represents the change from the home-like small cottages with central dining and recreation areas of the early resorts to the modern lodge buildings of later resorts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tourism on Isle Royale began with day or occasional visitation in the 1850s. By 1860-80 a limited number of excursion boats visited the island on day trips and fishing trips. From 1888, with the scheduled boat service of the A. Booth Company from Duluth to the island to service fishermen, the resort era began in earnest. By the turn of the century, development of resorts began with a few fishermen building cottages for tourists, as in the case of the Johns Hotel, Mattson's Tobin Harbor Resort and Tourist Home Resort. Soon after, individuals began to build resorts as commercial ventures: Park Place, Singer's and Belle Isle. A private club was established at Washington Harbor during the same period. By 1904, six resorts were in operation on the island; five of these were established between 1900-1902.

The Park Place Hotel was established by Kneut Kneutson during this period after vacationing at Mattson's Tobin Harbor Resort. Ownership of the Park Place Hotel was held by the directors and original stockholders, Kneut Kneutson and John E. Tappen, under the name Park Place Hotel Company. Kneutson was to directly operate the resort until World War I, when it was closed to the public. After the war he hired a series of managers until, in 1922, he hired his daughter Bertha to manage the resort under the agreement that he would build a modern lodge building, the Guest House, for visitor accommodations. The name of the resort was apparently changed to Rock Harbor Lodge at this time. Kneutson is supposed to have deeded the property to Bertha Farmer "after a few years." Mrs. Farmer was to remain manager until 1942.

The growth of resorts corresponded with the growth of private summer homes in the areas near the resorts. Both developments were possible because of the availability of land from the Isle Royale Land Corporation, a major landholding company from the last mining era. Tourism and resorts like Park Place Hotel expanded throughout the early 1900s, with a slowdown during

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World War I. The development was closely tied to transportation to the island, and most closely tied to the Booth and White Transportation Lines.

After the sinking of the America in 1928, and the closing of the Booth Company operations within a year, the resort era on Isle Royale began its decline. Problems came from the unreliable transportation, the national depression and the establishment of Isle Royale as a National Park. In 1937, Rock Harbor Lodge was considered one of the two viable resorts left operating on the island. The Rock Harbor Lodge was purchased by the National Park Service on July 22, 1938. The Park Service purchased all the other resort holdings on the island by the end of 1938. The Rock Harbor Lodge was included in NPS management plans as a visitor facility with the Guest House to be "removed upon provision of an acceptable unit." Although tourism continues since that time, it is of a different character from the earlier resort era.

PHYSICAL HISTORY

Construction began on the Guest House in 1922, continued in 1923 and was completed in 1924. It was first used for guest quarters on July 15, 1924. The guest House was built for Kneut Kneutson by professional builders and with some assistance from his grandson Westy Farmer. The Guest House was financed by Kneutson upon the request of his daughter and new manager of the Rock Island Lodge, Bertha Farmer. Mrs. Farmer wanted a modern lodge building with rooms for rent and an area for recreation of guests. Previous to this, the office building was used as a combination office and recreation building. Mrs. Farmer and Kneutson are supposed to have designed the Guest House. The structure was used as guest quarters by the Rock Harbor Lodge and the National Park Concession operations of the Rock Harbor Lodge until the early 1970s. The building is currently used for employee housing and storage.

The structure has been altered; the size and shape of the verandas has changed. The interior was built with seventeen guest rooms, later changed to fifteen rooms, and then changed back to sixteen. Ceiling and floor coverings have been changed, electric lights removed and/or replaced, and the hot water heat removed. Records of remodelings include major interior work by the National Park Service in 1943 and foundation work and rewiring in 1979.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Guest House is a two-and-a-half story, 32' x 60' building of frame construction. The first and second floors are 1,920 square feet each and the unfinished attic is approximately 1,850 square feet. The walls are drop siding painted coffee bean brown with green trim. The windows are typically six-over-six-light double hung sash, with paired four-over-four windows in the dormers. A rolled asphalt gable roof runs parallel to the shoreline with three dormers on the southeast slope. Both the roof and dormers have barge boards that simulate a kick, although the roof itself does not have a kick. The rafter ends are left exposed.

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The southeast facade, overlooking Rock Harbor, has six evenly spaced windows on both floors and three dormers above. French doors under a pedimented hood open onto a wooden veranda at the east end between the first and second windows. The veranda continues around the building all the way to the southwest side.

The northeast facade has paired windows flanking the outside end chimney on the first floor and single windows flanking the chimney on the second floor. There are two six light windows in the gable. Brackets support the overhanging eaves.

The northwest facade has irregularly spaced bays, with a door and three typical windows on the first floor and five windows on the second floor. There are no dormers. Wooden stairs beginning at the west end wrap around the corner to the southwest facade, where they provide access to a second story door.

The southwest facade has typical windows flanking a center door on both the first and second floor. An outside end chimney is set left-of-center between the door and window. A single six light window is in the gable.

The first floor has a large recreation room with cobblestone fireplace on the northeast end. The recreation room has an exterior door in the northwest wall and French doors leading to the veranda overlooking Rock Harbor on the southeast. The first floor also has six guest rooms and a lavatory. Open stairs in the northwest corner of the recreation room lead to the second floor, where there are another ten guest rooms and lavatory. The attic is unfinished.

Interior walls are covered with wallboard and ceilings are plastered. Floors are tongue-and-groove, mostly covered with linoleum. Interior trim is milled hardwood. A sample room generally has a small porcelain basin with plumbing exposed and a hardwood closet in one corner with a curtain covering the opening. Each room has at least one window and a single hung ceiling lamp. A bed, small shelf and mirror above the sink, built-in writing table and chair complete the typical furnishings in the guest rooms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Photographs in NPS Collections:

Black and White Collection

- 30-148- Viewed across water, Guest House & Flag Pole, 1938
- 30-303- View of Guest House and waters edge looking southwest, 1930s
- 40-60- Landward view of Guest House and Dinner Bell, 1945
- 50-141- Looking northeast along shoreline to Guest House, 1951
- 50-143- Looking from water at Guest House and Flag Pole, 1951

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Museum Collection

- #111 Appraisal Photograph Collection, August 25, 1935
 - #2305 Lakeside view
 - #3-1 Southwest and northwest walls, full frame
 - #3-4 North-northeast wall with chimney
 - #3-5 East-northeast frontview with chimney
 - #3-6 General view of stockade
- Bylo Farmer Accession, 1984
 - Photos #3, 4, 5, 6, and 7

References in NPS Files:

Park Building Files

Building Structure Inventory Forms - McLuckie Report

Oral History Collection

- Notes from Bylo Farmer Interview
- Taped Interview with Mrs. Gordon Hendrickson
- Taped Interview with Edgar Johns
- Taped Interview with Glenn Merritt
- Taped Interview with Laurie Snell
- Taped Interview with Weston Farmer
- Historic Structure Notes from Theresa Farmer Leavens

Park Naturalist Files "History-Resorts"

- Letter Mrs. Hilburn to Mrs. Matt Farmer, 2/4/60
- Letter Weston Farmer to John Morehead, 4/26/80
- Letter Bertha Farmer to Robert Carr, 1/25/60

Other Sources:

Anonymous. Rock Harbor Lodge Brochures, Tourist Home Brochure, Belle Isle Resort Brochures, Mining Lodge Brochures and Singer Lodge Brochure. Dates various. NPS Museum and Library Collections, Mott Island.

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PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was produced to mitigate the removal of the Rock Harbor Lodge Guest House. The documentation was compiled by Historical Architect Alan W. O'Bright of the Midwest Region of the National Park Service. The photographs were taken by Charlie Eschbach in 1985. The written historical and descriptive data was adapted from a Classified Structure Field Inventory Report by Carol L. Maass dated September 30, 1984. The records were transmitted to the Library of Congress by HABS/HAER Architect John A. Burns, AIA in March 1986.